



Social Integration in International Marriages between Russian Women and Korean Men in Urban South Korea

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Abstract

This study explores the everyday social integration experiences of Russian women married to Korean men and living in urban South Korea. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Everyday Multiculturalism and Multicultural Space-Making, the study investigates how cultural differences are negotiated in daily life through practices such as language use, food preparation, parenting, household routines, and everyday social interactions. The research aims to uncover how these women navigate between adaptation and cultural preservation, while also examining the influence of gender, family dynamics, and institutional structures on their integration trajectories. Using a qualitative research design, the study employed semi-structured, in-depth interviews and participant observations with Russian wives residing in Seoul, Suwon, and Incheon. The data were analyzed thematically to identify recurrent patterns, challenges, and strategies of adjustment. The findings reveal that these women actively shape their domestic, neighborhood, and digital environments to maintain cultural continuity while adapting to Korean norms. Their experiences illustrate that integration is not a linear process but a relational one, emerging through everyday negotiations with spouses, in-laws, and local communities. Overall, the study contributes to a more nuanced understanding of multicultural family life in South Korea, highlighting how non-Asian marriage migrants construct hybrid spaces of belonging and challenging policy-driven models that overlook their specific needs and experiences.

Keywords: everyday multiculturalism, identity, marriage migrants, multicultural space-making

1 Introduction

Migration has transformed South Korea's demographic landscape, challenging traditional notions of ethnic homogeneity (Lim, 2010). International marriages, particularly those between Korean men and foreign women, have become a key site where multicultural realities unfold. According to data from the Korean Statistical Information Service (KOSIS, 2025),

international marriages fluctuated between roughly 20,000 and 42,000 cases annually over the past two decades, underscoring their continued demographic relevance. Although multiculturalism has received policy attention, existing frameworks remain selective and often reinforce hierarchies based on race, gender, and socioeconomic status (Lim, 2010; Kim, 2018). Russian women married to Korean men constitute a small but growing group of non-Asian marriage migrants who remain largely absent from scholarship and policy discourse.

This study examines their experiences of social integration in urban Korea – Seoul, Suwon, and Incheon – focusing on everyday practices rather than institutional indicators. Integration is approached as a lived, relational process enacted through ordinary decisions: language use at home, food preparation, household negotiation, interactions with in-laws, digital community-building, and encounters in public spaces. Using *Everyday Multiculturalism* (Wise & Velayutham, 2009) and *Multicultural Space-Making* (Watson, 2017), the paper explores how these women actively participate in shaping hybrid cultural environments within marriage and urban life.

1.1 Problem Statement

These developments underscore the urgency of understanding how multiculturalism is negotiated at the everyday level by individuals embedded in cross-cultural family structures. The objects of this research are, on the one hand, South Korean society in general and, on the other, international residents in South Korea, represented in this study by Russian women married to Korean men. The subject of the research is the social integration of these women, viewed through the lens of multiculturalism as it manifests in various aspects of everyday life, including family relationships, domestic cultural practices, daily social interactions, work, and personal aspirations.

The purpose of this study is to examine how multiculturalism is perceived, lived, and negotiated in contemporary South Korea, particularly through the experiences of Russian women who have settled in the country through marriage. Rather than relying solely on institutional frameworks or demographic analysis, this study aims to explore the everyday practices through which these women navigate cultural differences, seek belonging, and shape family and social life. The main goal of the research is to understand how these individuals construct meaningful lives within the context of Korean society, not only by adapting to local norms, but also by integrating elements of their own cultural backgrounds into their homes and daily routines.

1.2 Delimitations

This research is limited to the experiences of Russian women married to Korean men and residing in urban settings such as Seoul, Suwon, and Incheon – areas where Russian-speaking communities are small and multicultural support services are less tailored to ethnically non-Asian migrants. While multicultural policies in South Korea have historically focused on rural regions with high concentrations of marriage migrants from Southeast Asia, urban environments present a different set of integration dynamics that remain relatively understudied. In particular, migrants like Russian women often navigate everyday life through informal networks rather than institutional support. This study does not examine Russian-speaking enclaves such as Incheon's Hambak Village or Seoul's Gwanghui-dong. Instead, it focuses on women living outside these ethnic clusters, negotiating multicultural life in more dispersed urban contexts. The study is further limited to interlocutors who have been married within the last decade, offering a contemporary view of multicultural family life. Finally, the analysis centers on non-institutional domains, such as home, social life, and digital spaces, rather than formal multicultural policy frameworks alone.

1.3 Significance

This research highlights a demographic rarely discussed within Korean multiculturalism debates, offering insight into how “non-targeted” migrants engage with local society. It contributes to micro-level understandings of multiculturalism as lived practice rather than policy discourse (Wise & Velayutham, 2009). In line with this perspective, scholars have noted that South Korea’s integration framework remains heavily state-centered and normatively assimilationist, often overlooking migrants’ everyday negotiations of belonging beyond institutional settings (Son, 2019).

1.4 Theoretical Background and Literature Review

South Korea’s multicultural policy reflects ethno-national ideologies rooted in *minjok* identity (Lim, 2009). Scholars note that marriage migrants, especially women, are often framed within patriarchal assimilationist narratives (Kim, 2018). *Everyday Multiculturalism* provides a lens to examine how difference is managed through mundane interactions (Wise & Velayutham, 2009), while *Multicultural Space-Making* emphasizes how families actively produce hybrid spaces (Watson, 2017). Together these frameworks guide the analysis.

In addition to policy-oriented analyses of Korean multiculturalism, a growing body of scholarship has examined international marriage as a gendered and stratified migration pathway. Research on marriage migrants in South Korea has predominantly focused on women from Southeast Asia, emphasizing their incorporation into rural communities, family hierarchies, and state-led integration programs (Kim, 2018; Lim, 2010). These studies highlight how integration is shaped by gendered expectations of caregiving, linguistic assimilation, and moral respectability, often positioning migrant wives as subjects of discipline rather than social actors.

More recent work has begun to examine alternative marriage constellations, including marriages between Korean men and women from Anglophone countries or Europe, which reveal different configurations of race, class, and cultural capital (Son, 2019). These studies suggest that while non-Asian wives may face less overt institutional surveillance, they are not necessarily better integrated; instead, their experiences are marked by cultural distance, informal exclusion, and limited access to tailored support structures. However, European and Slavic migrants remain significantly underrepresented in the literature, in both rural and urban contexts.

At the same time, scholarship on urban multiculturalism emphasizes that cities function as spaces of encounter where diversity is negotiated through everyday interactions rather than formal policy alone (Amin, 2002; Watson, 2017). This perspective shifts attention from state-centered models of integration toward micro-practices of coexistence embedded in domestic life, neighborhoods, and informal social networks. By focusing on Russian women married to Korean men in metropolitan South Korea, this study bridges marriage migration research with urban multiculturalism, contributing to a more differentiated understanding of how gender, space, and cultural distance shape everyday integration.

2 Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative, interpretivist research design aimed at understanding subjective experiences and meaning-making practices within multicultural domestic life. The decision to use qualitative methods is grounded in the belief that integration is not a linear, policy-driven process, but one that unfolds through everyday decisions, habits, and social interactions. This approach aligns with the theoretical frameworks of *Everyday Multiculturalism* and

Multicultural Space Making, both of which focus on the subtle, material, and affective dynamics of cultural coexistence.

Because this study focuses on Seoul, Suwon, and Incheon, the urban setting is central to understanding participants' integration experiences. Urban environments in South Korea tend to be more diverse, mobile, and cosmopolitan, offering greater anonymity, broader employment opportunities, and more flexible social norms. Such contexts often facilitate tolerance toward cultural difference – or, at minimum, a more pragmatic acceptance of diversity in everyday encounters.

This contrasts sharply with rural settings, where previous studies have documented stronger community surveillance, closer adherence to traditional gender roles, and more homogeneous social networks. Urban life therefore creates distinct conditions for multicultural place-making: women can access more varied social spaces, navigate diverse neighborhoods, and participate in informal transnational communities. Clarifying the concept of urbanity – not merely as a geographic category but as a socio-cultural environment characterized by density, heterogeneity, and modern service infrastructures – helps explain why Russian-Korean families in metropolitan areas may experience integration differently from those documented in rural scholarship.

2.1 Data Collection

This qualitative study draws on nine semi-structured interviews. Participants were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: being a Russian citizen or Russian-speaking women ranging in age from late 20-s to mid-30s married to a Korean man, residing in South Korea for a minimum of 18 months in an urban area. Interviews were conducted in Russian between March and September 2025, lasting 90–120 minutes. Participant recruitment occurred through Instagram, Telegram, and snowball sampling.

Recruitment through social media and snowball sampling reflects the dispersed nature of Russian-speaking populations in metropolitan Korea, where institutional or community-based sampling frames are limited. While this approach enabled access to a hard-to-reach population, it also introduced potential biases, including the overrepresentation of women who are digitally connected and socially active.

Table 1. Research participants' information

Name	Age	Years in Korea	Meeting Context	Work Status
Elena	34	8	Language exchange app	Housewife; K-beauty reseller and reviewer
Kate	26	3	Dating app, 2 years of long distance relationship	Freelance Photographer; Blogger
Maria	30	2	Dating app while she was travelling in Korea	Housewife; Worked remotely before childbirth
Vera	29	2	Marriage agency	Housewife; Worked remotely before childbirth
Nina	34	3	Met as students studying in China	Coordinator in medical clinic; Korean language tutor
Varya	28	4	Language exchange app	Professional teacher teaching Korean as a foreign language
Lera	26	3,5	Language exchange app	Korean language tutor for Russians

Name	Age	Years in Korea	Meeting Context	Work Status
Lina	30	6	She was studying in Korea, he was learning Russian - first chatted online then met for language practice	Aspiring tour guide (was taking exams at the period of interviewing and observation)
Nastya	34	11	Met her husband through a Korean friend from a student club in the university	Work in Event Agency

Social media was not only a recruitment tool but also a window into interlocutors' cultural lives. Platforms such as Telegram and Instagram serve as informal multicultural spaces where women share practical advice, engage in identity negotiation, and connect across physical distances. These digital interactions offered important insight into how integration extends beyond state programs and into everyday peer-to-peer relationships. While digital ethnography was not the primary method, it provided background context and helped situate the interviews within broader cultural ecosystems.

Data collection continued until thematic saturation was reached, defined as the point at which additional interviews no longer generated substantively new themes but reinforced existing analytical categories. By the ninth interview, patterns related to language negotiation, domestic practices, work aspirations, kinship relations, and social networking were consistently repeated across cases.

2.2 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke (2006) was used to identify recurring patterns, emotional undertones, and culturally meaningful practices across the data. The process began with thorough familiarization with the interview transcripts, which were read multiple times to gain an in-depth understanding of each interlocutor's narrative. During this stage, the researcher noted key phrases, metaphors, and emotional cues in the margins to guide the development of preliminary codes. These codes, which reflected topics such as experiences of social integration, language negotiations in domestic spaces, and the management of cultural differences, were then grouped into broader thematic categories.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim in Russian and analyzed in the original language to preserve semantic nuance. Translation into English was conducted selectively at the quotation stage. To enhance analytical reliability, coding was conducted iteratively, with codes refined through repeated comparison across interviews. An audit trail was maintained in the form of coded transcripts, analytic memos, and a reflexive journal documenting interpretive decisions and emerging themes. While formal inter-coder reliability was not employed due to the single-researcher design, transparency was ensured through systematic documentation of analytical steps.

2.3 Positionality

As a Russian-speaking woman who has lived in both Russian and Korean cultural contexts, the researcher occupies a hybrid positionality that blends insider and outsider perspectives. This dual positioning shaped both the access to interlocutors and the quality of data collected. On one hand, shared language, nationality, and cultural references with interlocutors fostered immediate rapport, allowing for trust-building and emotionally open conversations. Interlocutors often expressed relief and comfort in speaking Russian to someone who

understood both their cultural references and the nuances of navigating life in South Korea. This linguistic and cultural proximity enabled the researcher to interpret non-verbal cues, emotional subtexts, and implicit meanings with a degree of cultural sensitivity that might not be available to an outsider.

At the same time, the researcher remained aware of the risks of over-identification and unchecked assumptions. To mitigate this, a reflexive stance was maintained throughout the research process. A personal research journal was kept to record moments of emotional resonance, discomfort, or bias, as well as to document shifts in the researcher's thinking. This helped in identifying how the researcher's own positionality – age, background, values, and emotional responses – could shape the framing of questions, interpretation of stories, and the construction of meaning in analysis.

Furthermore, the researcher's familiarity with the Korean cultural context enabled her to decode social cues and institutional structures mentioned by interlocutors, allowing for a more contextually grounded interpretation. At the same time, not being Korean meant she could approach Korean cultural norms with a degree of analytical distance, questioning the 'taken-for-granted' and capturing how cultural frictions or accommodations were experienced by the interlocutors. In sum, the researcher's positionality was both a methodological asset and a point of critical self-awareness. By leveraging insider knowledge while maintaining analytical distance, the study benefits from a nuanced, ethically attentive, and contextually rich engagement with the lived realities of multicultural family life in South Korea.

2.4 Ethics

Ethical considerations were integral to the research design and data collection process. Each participant received a plain-language explanation of the study's goals and a list of supporting questions, they were also informed about confidentiality measures. Given the minimal-risk nature of the study and its focus on adult participants, the research was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines of qualitative social research. All participants provided verbal informed consent after receiving a clear explanation of the study's aims, voluntary nature, and confidentiality measures. Pseudonyms were used, and identifying details were removed or altered to protect participants' anonymity. Audio recordings, transcripts, and field notes were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher.

3 Findings

Most of the participants interviewed for this study met their husbands either through online dating platforms or, in one case, through a match-making agency, sometimes while still living in Russia, and sometimes while visiting Korea as tourists. A minority of participants met their spouse during their student years, either in Korea or abroad. The majority had already spent some time in Korea before settling there permanently as spouses, which allowed them to form early personal impressions of Korean society and culture prior to marriage. Unlike typical portrayals of marriage migrants, often depicted as coming from rural or low-income backgrounds, all of the women in this study came from middle-class Russian families, held higher education degrees, and had professional or academic experiences prior to migration. Their weddings had predominantly taken place in Korea, and all participants were currently residing in urban centers such as Seoul, Suwon, or Incheon, rather than in areas with concentrated Russian-speaking enclaves.

3.1 Language, Identity, and Cultural Transmission

Language surfaced as a central, emotionally charged domain. Women described households as sites where Russian and Korean could coexist, with language practices focused on both communication and cultural transmission to children.

Vera: *“Both me and my husband want our son to speak both languages. My husband even wants him to know three languages from a very childhood... My only worry is to save the connection with him, so it’s important for me that he understands and somehow speaks Russian.”*

Many mothers prioritised creating a Russian-speaking environment at home while acknowledging the dominance of Korean in kindergartens and schools. Some adopted a pragmatic stance: Maria said, *“I believe that Russian is necessary... Honestly, it’s enough for me if he will simply understand Russian speech.”* This balance – encouragement rather than coercion – recurs across interviews.

Husbands’ engagement varied. Varya described her husband’s slow but persistent efforts: *“It’s very hard for him! We even have a few Russian language textbooks... Still, he knows some daily phrases and useful words.”* In some households, husbands actively used Russian media (TV, films) as a shared domestic practice that eased language transmission.

Temporal and spatial shifts were common. Elena noted that her child’s first words were Russian, switched to Korean after kindergarten, but improved again after a month-long stay in Russia: *“Their first words were in Russian... Later, we spent over a month in Russia... my daughter started speaking Russian again.”* Travel and extended kin networks thus operate as practical mechanisms for sustaining minority language use.

Spousal bilingualism sometimes prevented language loss altogether: Lina’s husband already knew Russian, making their home naturally multilingual. Conversely, Nina’s early relationship used Chinese as the language of communication – demonstrating the creative multilingual strategies couples adopt when direct language overlap is limited.

For participants without children, Russian phrases functioned as intimacy markers. Lera: *“For some reason, it is very important to me that he says ‘Bud’ zdorova’ – this was the very first thing I taught him.”* These examples show language as both transmission and symbolic care.

3.2 Food and Rituals as Everyday Multicultural Practices

Food and ritual are dense sites of cultural exchange. Most households maintained Korean meals alongside regular Russian dishes; sometimes Russian foods (blini, shashlik, mashed potato with cutlets) became family favourites.

Nina: *“He eats everything I cook... If he wants to eat Korean food, he goes and orders it. Or we go to his parents!... I cook what I’m used to eating. And he’s very accepting.”*

Varya’s husband developed preferences: *“He loves some of the Russian dishes such as shashlik... and especially blini.”* For children, Elena observed enthusiastic responses: *“They always ask for blini on weekends. For me, it’s a way to show them something from my own childhood.”*

Rituals were layered rather than replaced. Families often celebrated Russian New Year alongside Seollal, creating hybrid calendars. Elena recounted initial fatigue from her husband that later transformed into participation: *“At first, I stubbornly tried to organize holidays myself... Now he even helps: blowing balloons, buying some decorations.”* Small domestic rituals – weekly blini breakfasts, Paskha desserts introduced by a mother – gradually produced shared meanings.

Rituals could also extend into symbolic domains. Varya described how watching Russian historical series sparked her husband's curiosity about Christianity and Russian cultural history – an engagement beyond cuisine into belief and narrative. Lina's emphasis on small gestures (receiving flowers without reason) reshaped her husband's behaviour at work and home, illustrating how private expectations can ripple into public sociality.

3.3 Working Wives and Shifting Domestic Boundaries

Participants consistently expressed a desire to work for reasons of autonomy, identity, and dignity, not merely survival. Employment ranged from part-time jobs and freelancing to professional retraining (e.g., TOPIK preparation, tour-guide licensing) and creative projects.

Kate: *"I'd like to earn something for my own wants... to invest in my blog, to invest in photography—that's something I want to do myself."*

Nina: *"I can't sit still... I have a complex that says, 'I'm good when I'm needed.'"*

Husbands' support mattered. Vera: *"My husband suggested that... we could buy a house and maybe open a little café... because I really love baking."* In some couples, professional projects became joint plans – Lina and her husband preparing for tour-guide exams to run a small business together.

Work also reconfigured domestic labour. Several women reported greater husband involvement in childcare and chores; Maria's husband took six months of parental leave: *"I didn't ask him... he took parental leave, and for six months he helped me."* Such instances indicate shifts toward more collaborative family arrangements and challenge monolithic stereotypes about migrant wives' domestic roles.

Yet economic participation was as much about selfhood as about income. Varya expressed a desire for financial independence: *"I want at least to have some of my own money, so I don't have to ask for things I want... I want to do something of my own."* These motivations illustrate how work functions as a vehicle for agency and social participation within migrant life.

3.4 In-laws, Social Networks and Everyday Interactions

In-laws often shaped daily integration, offering both support and constraints. Many participants experienced warmth: Maria recalled her mother-in-law greeting her with a hug at the first meeting: *"I was just some girl here... But she came up to me and hugged me. I was completely shocked."* Vera recounted intensive postnatal support: *"When our child was born... she came and lived with us for two months... She cooked, cleaned... She went on walks with me, gave me massages."*

Fathers-in-law also provided care: Lina described being handed money to visit her family – *"Buy a ticket – go see your family"* – and remembered small gestures like preparing banchan and recognizing personal preferences. Lera contrasted distant parental ties in Russia with close in-law support in Korea, describing her mother-in-law as a "golden woman."

However, in-law relations could also be restrictive. Nastya described unilateral scheduling by her mother-in-law: *"Sometimes they say we need to meet... if I can't that day... I have to kill myself, but make it."* Elena felt her in-laws were *"grandparents for an hour,"* signaling limited engagement. These mixed experiences show kinship as both enabling and boundary-setting in integration processes.

Outside family, social and virtual spaces played key roles. Living outside dense Russian enclaves, women relied on Telegram, Instagram, and Facebook to form informal networks that often materialised into hiking groups, playdates, and mutual aid. Kate: *"[A friend] shared the*

idea in her Telegram channel... we meet almost every week with a shared goal.” Lera organised groups via her blog: *“Mostly it’s Russian-speaking. The fact that we go hiking together – that’s basically a club I opened myself!”*

Not all co-ethnic ties were instantly supportive. Elena described early isolation and perceived gatekeeping: *“When I first moved here... I had... a terrible depression... Why is it that your own people so often push you away?”* This highlights that shared nationality does not guarantee emotional connection.

Encounters with Koreans were ambivalent. Kate noted both warmth and hostility: *“Some days... everyone behaves nice... but there are also moments... typical Korean aunties who tend to be rude... it’s very common to be pushed by them in a subway.”* Acts of kindness also mattered; Maria recalled hospital staff who comforted her during a frightening pregnancy: *“A nurse unexpectedly comforted me, even offering a hug,”* and later mentioned getting into a KakaoTalk group with the other new mothers. Taken together, these mundane and often fleeting interactions resonate with Amin’s (2002) argument that urban multiculturalism is produced less through deep intercultural intimacy than through repeated, low-intensity encounters that normalize differences within shared urban spaces.

Spousal relationships often became the primary arena for integration. Vera described how her husband prioritised conversation with her when she had few others to rely on: *“He said: ‘...you have no one to talk to... so of course I immediately talk with you, because right now I’m the only person you can have a real conversation with.’”* Across cases, husbands’ international exposure, willingness to learn another language, and practical support were central to creating hybrid domestic spaces.

Across themes, integration appears as an iterative, relational, and practical process enacted through language choices, culinary routines, rituals, labour arrangements, kinship, and digital networking. While state programs remain peripheral to these women’s everyday lives, personal agency, spousal cooperation, and informal communities sustain multicultural belonging in urban Korea.

4 Conclusion

As stated in the research objectives, this study has examined the processes of social integration in international marriages between Russian women and Korean men in South Korea. By looking beyond the state-centered and policy-driven approaches that often dominate the discussion of “multicultural families,” the research highlighted the lived experiences of a group that remains largely absent from dominant narratives: white, European women who do not fit the stereotype of the Southeast Asian marriage migrant. Their presence reveals both the diversity of multicultural family formations in Korea and the limits of a framework that assumes integration is a one-directional adaptation of the migrant wife.

The findings of the research show that integration in these marriages is best understood as a dynamic, everyday practice. It unfolds not through formal state programs but through the accumulation of small, ordinary interactions in households, workplaces, and informal social spaces. In this sense, the concept of Everyday Multiculturalism helps to capture how differences are negotiated in seemingly mundane acts – sharing meals, navigating bilingual conversations, or deciding which holidays to celebrate. These practices reveal that integration is not assimilation into a Korean way of life, but a constant negotiation of multiple cultural repertoires that takes shape within intimate family spaces. This emphasis on routine interactions highlights how flexibility, reciprocity, and emotional labor shape multicultural family life.

The domestic sphere emerged as the first and most immediate site of negotiation. Language practices were central: while Korean husbands often expected their wives to master Korean for practical communication and family relations, many also showed curiosity toward Russian, whether learning phrases such as “*Bud’ zdorova*” (“Bless you”) or attempting to read Cyrillic script. Such exchanges illustrate how the household becomes a small but significant site of Multicultural Space-Making, where belonging is shaped through playful, affective, and uneven exchanges rather than through formal proficiency. Food and ritual practices reinforced this hybridity – Russian dishes placed alongside Korean meals or dual New Year’s celebrations created shared domestic spaces where both partners’ identities were acknowledged. The home thus becomes a microcosm of coexistence, challenging the notion of integration as one-sided adaptation.

Employment was indeed an important aspiration for many women, both as a means of economic participation and as a way of sustaining personal identity. However, the dynamics within families did not neatly align with conventional assumptions that women’s earnings automatically shift household hierarchies. What stood out in interlocutors’ accounts was that, regardless of whether they worked outside the home or not, their Korean husbands were often willing to participate in household practices: actively engaged in childcare, cooking, or daily chores. For several women, this came as a surprise, since their cultural background in Russia had normalized a “double burden” model, where even in dual-income households the bulk of domestic responsibilities fell on women. This finding highlights how integration does not simply reproduce dominant gendered scripts but creates opportunities for unexpected negotiations of domestic responsibility.

Social and virtual spaces further illustrate the fluidity of integration. For many women, in-laws played a paradoxical role: they were both gatekeepers of cultural legitimacy and potential sources of tension, especially when expectations of childcare or domestic work clashed with the wives’ own aspirations. At the same time, friendship networks – both offline and online – provided crucial support. Hiking clubs, parenting groups, or digital communities of Russian speakers in Korea became parallel sites of belonging. These spaces offered emotional support, practical advice, and opportunities for leisure, enabling women to navigate the loneliness and cultural distance they often felt in mainstream Korean society. Here, Multicultural Space-Making extends beyond the private household, as women create supportive micro-communities that allow them to sustain hybrid identities and transnational connections.

Beyond these organized networks, women’s day-to-day interactions with Koreans in public and semi-public spaces also played a role in shaping their integration experiences. Such encounters were marked by ambivalence: on the one hand, interlocutors recalled moments of rudeness or social distance, such as being pushed in public transport or brushed aside by strangers, which reinforced feelings of exclusion. On the other hand, there were also instances of unexpected kindness and solidarity – supportive café owners, attentive medical staff, or friendly acquaintances in hospitals and community settings – that disrupted stereotypes and fostered small but meaningful connections. These contrasting experiences highlight that integration is not only negotiated in the structured contexts of family or community networks but also in fleeting, everyday interactions with strangers. In this sense, social interactions with locals reveal both the challenges and possibilities of recognition, reminding us that integration unfolds not only through formal ties and sustained relationships but also through the micro-moments of daily life.

Across these domains, one consistent finding is that integration is not an individual achievement but a relational process. It depends on the openness and adaptability of both partners, as well as their families, communities and representatives of the hosting society. A

husband's willingness to try Russian food, an in-law's acceptance of a bilingual grandchild, or a friend's inclusion in a hiking trip all demonstrate that belonging is co-produced through interaction. In this sense, integration is better conceived as a shared project of negotiating differences rather than a checklist of the migrant wife's adjustments. This relational framing underscores that successful integration emerges through reciprocity, not unilateral assimilation.

While these findings emphasize the agency of Russian marriage migrants in creating their own pathways of adaptation, they also highlight the limitations of South Korea's multicultural policies. Current initiatives, shaped largely around Asian marriage migrants, overlook the growing number of non-Asian spouses who face comparable struggles in language, institutional navigation, and social networking. The experiences of Russian women show that integration is not linear or guaranteed by perceived "advantages" of race, education, or class; recognition, legitimacy, and belonging remain ongoing challenges. At the same time, their everyday acts of negotiation and the creation of intimate multicultural spaces reveal dimensions invisible to official discourse, underscoring the need for more flexible, inclusive policies to support diverse families and strengthen Korea's multicultural society.

The findings point to several policy implications. Despite the increasing diversity of marriage migrants in South Korea, multicultural support systems remain largely oriented toward Asian women in rural settings, leaving urban and non-Asian spouses insufficiently recognized. Policy interventions could include more flexible Korean language programs designed for advanced or mixed-language households, culturally diverse parenting resources that acknowledge bilingual and bicultural childrearing, and community initiatives in urban districts that facilitate intercultural interaction beyond ethnic targeting. Importantly, such programs should be framed inclusively, avoiding assumptions about migrants' cultural background or socioeconomic status.

At the same time, the findings should be interpreted in light of their limitations. Based on nine urban cases, this study does not aim to produce generalizable claims about all Russian or European marriage migrants in South Korea. Instead, it offers analytically grounded insights into everyday integration processes within a specific social and spatial context. Future research could expand the sample, include rural–urban comparisons, or incorporate husbands' and children's perspectives to further examine how Multicultural Space-Making evolves over time.

Beyond the policy sphere, the specificity of Russian wives' experiences invites a broader reflection on what distinguishes them from other groups of marriage migrants – and how the idea of space operates within their everyday lives. What differentiates the experiences of Russian wives is precisely the cultural distance they inhabit — which in turn shapes how "space" is negotiated. While many Asian-marriage migrants arrive from societies that share certain Confucian legacies, collectivist orientations or East Asian social norms, the Russian–Korean pairing sits elsewhere on the spectrum of proximity. Russian cultural inheritance, with its more direct emotional expression, less rigid gender-role discipline and different food and ritual sensibilities, means that blending is less automatic.

In both domestic and virtual settings – such as a bilingual parenting chat, a weekend meal blending borscht and kimchi, or a husband learning Cyrillic – the household becomes a hybrid space where neither partner simply adapts into the other, but together they configure a shared environment. This space is simultaneously physical (home, neighbourhood, workplace) and virtual (online communities, bilingual social media). In such spaces the challenge is not only one of mastering language or customs, but of transforming difference into everyday familiarity. The larger cultural gap makes "otherness" more visible but also creates opportunities to negotiate identity and belonging in ways culturally proximate couples may not experience.

In reflecting on the implications for the larger society, this relational and spatial view of integration points to a shift in how we understand migrant wives in Korea. Rather than viewing them as individuals who must adapt into Korean norms, their stories show that they – together with their partners – produce new multicultural spaces. Compared to Korean women, who operate within long-standing cultural layers of national identity, hierarchical family expectations and embedded gender scripts, the foreign spouse, Russian in this case study, may approach the family world without the same inherited “cultural superstructure” that constrains many native women. Their outsider status sometimes allows them to bypass certain local tacit expectations and create forms of domestic and social life that are more flexible, experimental, and negotiated. In policy and social discourse terms, the rise of marriages to non-Asian women underscores that integration policy in Korea must become more spatially aware, more relational, and more inclusive of cultural differences.

Future research could extend this study by comparing integration experiences across different metropolitan areas or between urban and rural regions, where demographic diversity, social expectations, and levels of community surveillance differ substantially. Longitudinal studies following multicultural couples over time would also help illuminate how negotiation within marriage evolves through life transitions such as childbirth, children’s schooling, or career changes. Additionally, further examination of husbands’ perspectives, children’s bicultural identity formation, and the role of digital communities would offer valuable insights into emerging forms of everyday multiculturalism in South Korea.

Overall, the integration of Russian wives in South Korea should be understood as an ongoing, negotiated process at the intersection of intimacy, economy, and community. By emphasizing everyday multiculturalism and the making of multicultural spaces, the research demonstrates how belonging emerges not from top-down directives but from the lived creativity of families who navigate differences together. This perspective calls for policies and social discourses that recognize and support the multiplicity of multicultural family experiences, moving beyond stereotypes and embracing the diverse ways in which people build shared lives across cultural boundaries.

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